L I G U S T R O

Giovanni Berio, who works under the pseudonym of Ligustro, was born in Imperia (Italy) in 1924.

Since 1986 he has dedicated himself exclusively to the study of Japanese coloured woodblock printing and the Nishiki-e techniques in use during the Edo period, creating hand-prints on highly prized paper produced in Japan using traditional craft methods.

Ligustro Nishiki-e technique consists in having, for each print, many woods that will be printed one by one. For this reason, there could be some print with the same drawing but with different colours.

He gives lectures and practical demonstration to bring this artistic technique and its fascinating history to the general public.

Ligustro passed away peacefully on 11th December 2015 surrounded by loved ones and many friends: from his beloved Japan, held in his small studio in Imperia Oneglia, Ligustro leaves extraordinary ideas to grasp and wonderful artworks to enjoy.

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LE OPERE DI LIGUSTRO SONO ACQUISTABILI

LIGUSTRO'S ARTWORKS ARE ON SALE

1984	La Scaletta Art Gallery, Imperia, Italy (solo)
1985	La Scaletta Art Gallery, Imperia, Italy (solo)
1987	La Scaletta Art Gallery, Imperia, Italy (solo)
1987	Beniamino Art Gallery, Sanremo (IM), Italy (collective)
1988	International Cultural Center, Genova, Italy (solo)
1989	Italian Association Ex-Libris, Milan, Italy (collective)
1989	Exposition of 4 exemplars of the print *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi* in 4 locations at the same time: Xylon Museum und Werkstatten, Schwetzingen, Germany; Berlin (Check Point Charlie); Warsaw; Paris (collective)
1989	Contemporary art museum Villa Croce, Genova, Italy (collective)
1989	International book fair, Torino, Italy (collective)
1989	Ducal palace, Urbino (PU), Italy (collective)
1990	Lyceum Virgilio cultural association, Rome, Italy (solo)
1990	Donation of the Surimono *Year of the horse* to the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art, Genova, Italy
1991	Rocca Palace, Chiavari (GE), Italy (collective)
1991	Il Quadrato Art Gallery, Chieri (TO), Italy (collective)
1992	Donation of the book *I Palloncini* to the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art, Genova, Italy
1992	Ex-Libris Catalan Association, Spain (collective)
1992	Multipurpose cultural center, Imperia, Italy (collective)
1993	Palace of permanent, Foundation I. Berlusconi, Milan, Italy (collective)
1993	Cooperation for publishing the book *San-Zj-Jing (Three Character Classic)*, Bocca Library, Milan, Italy
1994	Stelline palace, 25° congress Ex- Libris, Milan, Italy (collective)

1994	Exposition of the *Folksong* set, composed of 30 prints obtained from the music with the same name, made for the consignement of the Novaro Prize to the Master Luciano Berio, Genova (solo)
1994	Paganini Conservatory, Genova, Italy (solo)
1996	Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art, Genova, Italy (solo)
1997	Donation of the book *12 haiku del poeta Matsu Bashò* to the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art, Genova Italy. This exquisite book has been realized with 24 prints, placed two by two showing, on one side the haiku text with its original calligraphy and on the other side the Italian translation.
1997	Multipurpose cultural center, Imperia, Italy (solo)
1997	Donation of the print *La perla e la farfalla – Gioia di vivere* to the City of Imperia
2001	Castle Costa del Carretto, Garlenda (SV), Italy (solo)
2003	Donation of some artworks to the City of Garlenda to set up a permanent exposition in the castle Costa del Carretto, Garlenda (SV), Italy
2003	Casa Liguria, Bruxelles, Belgium (solo)
2003	Japanese Embassy, Bruxelles, Belgium (collective)
2003	Demonstration about engraving and Nishiki-e printing at the Japanese Cultural Institute, Bruxelles, Belgium
2007	Donation of the surimono realized as a gift for the birth of Prince Hisahito to the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art, Genova, Italy
2007	Donation of 6 coloured woodblock printings as follows: 4 woodblock printings showing the *carpa guizzante che risale la cascata (koi no taki nobori)* and 2 woodblock printings illustrating *fiori d'iris (kakitsubata)* to the Edoardo Chiossone Museum of Oriental Art, Genova, Italy
2007	Headquarter of Carige Bank, Genova, Italy (solo)
2009	Donation of *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi* print to the Italian Central State Archives – part of the permanent exhibition – Rome, Italy
2011	Charity event *Sos Chef Giappone* for the victims of earthquake and tsunami of 11th March 2011 at the Città del Gusto (Gambero Rosso) with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation, Rome, Italy (solo)
2011	Public library Rispoli, Rome, Italy (solo)

2011	Meeting *Violence against women*, yesterday and today organized by the LIONS Clubs international - Clubs Roma Augustus and Guidonia Montecelio, Rome (solo)
2012	Meeting *Violence against women*, yesterday and today organized by the LIONS Clubs international - Clubs Imperia Host with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation, Imperia (solo)
2012	The *6th Fu Xian Zhai Exlibris Invitation Competition* and *Exlibris Collection Exhibition*, Shanghai, China (collective)
2012	Auser Filo d'Argento, Imperia, Italy (solo)
2012	*The Italian xilography: from Levanto's international exibition to today 1912 – 2012*, Santa Caterina monumental complex, Finale Ligure (SV), Italy (collective)
2012	*The Italian xilography: from Levanto's international exibition to today 1912 – 2012*, Palazzina delle Arti, La Spezia, Italy (collective)
2013	*The Italian xilography: from Levanto's international exibition to today 1912 – 2012*, Carlo Servolini art gallery, Collesalvetti (LI), Italy (collective)
2013	Meeting *Ligustro – the orient and occident* - Rowing-club Lazio, with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation, LIONS Club International – Club Roma Augustus, Rome (solo)
2013	Zen Sushi restaurant with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation, Milan, Italy (solo)
2014	Kunstmuseum of Bayreuth, Germany, organized by La Spezia city hall (collective)
2014	Conference *Ligustro and the Xilography of the two worlds: the orient and the occident* organized by the Association of Veneti in Rome with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation, Rome (solo)
2014	Permanent exhibition of the poem *Gioia di Vivere* at the Foundation Ardoino Morelli, Diano Marina (IM), Italy
2014	Donation of the Surimono print *Il ritorno delle farfalle* and of the poem *Gioia di vivere* to the Public Library of national monument, Grottaferrata (Rome), Italy
2014	Conference *Ligustro and the Xilography of the two worlds: the orient and the occident* at the Pontifical institute PIO IX dei Fratelli di Nostra Signora della Misericordia, with the sponsorship of the Embassy of Japan, of the Italy-Japan Foundation, of the LIONS Club International – Club Roma Augustus, of the Association Observo Onlus, Rome and of the Association ex Alunni Pio IX, Rome, Italy (solo)
2014	*35° International congress of ex-libris* Catalogna, La Pineda, Vila Seca, Spain (collective)

2015	Donation of 5000 engraved woods, 2000 art books, correspondence, Japanese calligraphies, and some art works (personal and of other authors) to the public library Leonardo Lagorio of Imperia, with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation and of the Mario Novaro Foundation. Exposition and donation of the surimono *Imperia la città che sale* made for the event, Imperia, Italy (solo)
2015	Exposition of the print *Geisha alla finestra* and introduction to Ligustro's art during the 17th Ligurian exhibition of Camelia, Arenzano (GE), Italy
2015	Opening of the room dedicated to Ligustro at the public library Leonardo Lagorio of Imperia, with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation and the Mario Novaro Foundation, Imperia (Italy)
2015	*Ligustro – The painter of the floating world (Ukiyo-e)*, museum of Chinese Art and Ethnographic - Saveriani Missionaries - as a part of the event Maschere Italiane a Parma 2015, with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation and of the Italian Association Ex Libris, Parma, Italy (solo)
2015	Participation at the EXPO MILAN 2015, invitation as Excellency representing the Liguria Region and the City of Imperia for the important artistic and cultural activities, Milan, Italy (solo)
2015	Exposition of the surimono print *Il ritorno delle farfalle*, donated to the Lions Club International District 108L, during the EXPO MILAN 2015, Milan, Italy (solo)
2015	Exposition *Ligustro and his Japan* at the public library Leonardo Lagorio of the city of Imperia, with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation, of the Association for the traditional Japanese culture - Aikikai d'Italia and of the Mario Novaro Foundation, Imperia (solo). During the exposition it has been possible to enjoy some events connected to the Japanese tradition such as exposition of engraved woods, Aikidō, ikebana, origami and Nishiki-e laboratories
2015	Ligustro themed evening *Ligustro and his prints*, exchange of ideas about the artist and his work at the cultural center Il Caleido, Rome
2016	Exposition of Ligustro artworks, as special guest, and of his students, with the sponsorship of the Foundation Italy-Japan, in the castle Costa del Carretto during the *33rd International Meeting Fiat 500 Club Italia* dedicated to the Fiat 500 lovers from Japan. At the same time, art show *About Kintsugi*, old Japanese technique to rebuild objects using precious metals, Garlenda (Savona), (collective)

2016	*Ligustro and his Japan* at the Central Archives of the State in Rome, within the initiative Sunday Paper as national event, proposed by the Ministry of heritage and cultural activities and tourism, that sees institutions preserving the documentary heritage. The event celebrates also the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and Japan. Ligustro's event has been supported by the City of Imperia, the Foundation Italy-Japan, the Japanese Cultural Institute, the association A&A Music, the European Manga Academy, the Japanese Traditional Cultural Society – Aikikai of Italy, by the Ikebana International organization and by the Centro Diffusione Origami. More than 60 prints, engraved woods, tools, books among other masterpieces previously donated to the public library Leonardo Lagorio of the City of Imperia were exposed during the exhibition. During the event it was possible to admire some typical performing linked to the classic Japanese culture such as Aikido, Ikebana, Origami, manga, Japanese calligraphy, tea ceremony and Music Bells concert. Rome, Italy (solo)
2016	*Ligustro - the rainbow researcher*: commemorative day of the artist at the public library Leonardo Lagorio of the City of Imperia during which it was illustrated how the masterpieces of Ligustro celebrated the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and Japan at the Central Archives of the State in Rome; guided visits of the room dedicated to the Master and exhibition of original prints of Ligustro and of his students, Imperia (collective)
2017	*International Mokuhanga Conference 2017 (IMC2017Hawaii*): attendance of the student and artist Ms. Maria Nella Ponte, also known as Hellory, to the international Mokuhanga Conference, which has as its aim the promotion of a better understanding of Mokuhanga – Japanese woodblock printing developed during the Edo period. This four-day event involves presentations and workshops about Ligustro and his techniques Nishiki-e, Honolulu, Hawaii, United States (collective)
2017	*Conference at the art college Klee Barabino:* conference to promote and enhance Ligustro's role and the Edo period woodblock printing technique that he has rediscovered and reprocessed, aimed to the creation and promotion of the Ligustro prize addressed to the educational establishments. With the sponsorship of the City of Imperia, the Foundation Italy-Japan, the International center for Arts Antinoo - Marguerite Yourcenar and of the Mario Novaro Foundation, Genoa (Italy)
2017	*Ligustro and his Japan*: exhibition at the Club of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs for the 70th anniversary of the first Club for UNESCO in the world, established in 1947 in Sendai (Japan), after the World War II. During the exposition *The Japanese xilos in the world illustrated by "Ukiyo-e" - a contribution of the orient in occidental art* the exposition and the presentation of Ligustro's art are within the setting of the premio Ligustro. With the sponsorship of the City of Imperia, the Foundation Italy-Japan, the International center for Arts Antinoo - Marguerite Yourcenar and of the Mario Novaro Foundation, Rome (Italy) (collective, with antique Japanese prints)

2018	*Ligustro…questo sconosciuto*: exposition organized by the City of Imperia at the public library Leonardo Lagorio, with the sponsorship of the Italy-Japan Foundation, the International center for Arts Antinoo - Marguerite Yourcenar and of the Mario Novaro Foundation. Carlo Senesi, professor of art history, painter and art director, looked after the event; during the exhibition visitors could enjoy several side events such as the guided visit of the reading and woodblocks room, the xylography's workshops or the exposition of Japanese papers Washi Awagami (included in the Unesco world heritage). They could also watch the presentation of the Ligustro prize and the conference International Mokuhanga Conference 2017 (IMC2017Hawaii): "the discovery of the luxurious techniques of Japanese Xilography in Ligustro arts", Imperia, Italy (solo)
2018	Conference "*Ligustro, from Genoa…to Edo"* held at University Library of Genova, within the framework of the project "Ligustro Prize", with the sponsorship of the City of Imperia, of Foundation Italy-Japan, of International center for Arts Antinoo - Marguerite Yourcenar and of the Mario Novaro Foundation. The donation of the copy of the digital archive of Giovanni Berio Ligustro from the public library Leonardo Lagorio of the City of Imperia to the University Library of Genova took place in presence of the council member of the City of Imperia, Mrs. Enrica Fresia, empowered by its mayor. The following spoke: Megumi Akanuma (ambassador of Genoa in the world), Francesco Berio, Alessandra Gagliano Candela, Fulvio Ioan, Maria Novaro, Umberto Padovani, Stefano Patrone, Monica Ramò, Stefania Semolini also known as Edhéra, Genoa (solo)
2018	Donation of the Surimono print *Gioia di vivere - La perla e la farfalla* to the University Library of Genova, Genova (Italy)
2018	Presentation of the book *Imperia, un sogno…*written by Maria Lamonica Cardone for the 50th anniversary of the Foundation Associazione Circolo Parasio of Imperia, with the sponsorship of the city of Imperia. The book talks about notable people connected with Imperia, among others Ligustro and his scholars. The Surimono *Imperia la città che sale* is shown on the cover: this artwoork has been carried out by Ligustro specifically for the City of Imperia for the opening of the room dedicated to him in 2015 at the public library Leonardo Lagorio, Imperia
2018	Ligustro themed evening *Ligustro's weaving between art, poetry and philosophy,* exchange of ideas about the artist and his work at the cultural center Il Caleido, Rome
2018	*Ligustro and the last impressionist*, an exhibition dedicated to Liguria and its landscapes full of color and light that characterized and made the Impressionists famous to the general public, the same light that fascinated Ligustro, the genius of modern woodcut, to the point to dedicate to landscape a large collection of pastels with great character and visual impact. That same light that vibrates in the works of the last of the Impressionists, the artist Osvaldo Faraldi. Galleria Barattolo, Imperia (collective)

Nishiki-E	Brocade prints, a term used to denote the coloured woodcuts produced from 1765 onward using cherry and pear woods
Bokashi	Shaded colour printing
Gindei	The use of powdered silver to highlight fine details in the print
Gin-Sunago	Silver flakes and powder scattered in the surface to create effects of light in individual plates in order to create identical prints
Karazuri	Printing whit parts created by pressure alone, without colour, in order to create relief and three-dimensional effect
Kimekomi	Printing using the reverse of the Karazuri technique giving an engraved, grooved effect
Kindei	Colour given by powdered gold to cover small areas of the prints with decorative motifs
Kinpaku	Use of gold leaf to cover larger areas of the print
Kin-Sunago	Gold flake and powdered scattered on the surface to create effects of light in individual plates in order to create identical prints
Kirazuri	Mica prints, with the application of particles of powdered pearl and mica in order to create silvered or shining effects
Mokkotsu	Type of painting or engraving in the Chinese tradition involving paiting figures without creating outlines
Sabi-Bori	Method of engraving used to create the effect of brush strokes in Japanese calligraphy
Kira-E	Mica prints
Ginpaku	Prints on silvered sheets
Ichimai-E	Single sheet print
Yoko-E	Horizontal print
Fukei-E	Print of landscape
Maki-E	Print sprinkled with gold powder
Urushi-E	Technique used to enhanced the appearance and quality of the works
Koroku	Printing technique used to enhance profiles
Gofun	Fine lacquermade from ground oystershell in use since 1751
Nashiji	Gold flakes are sprinkled onto the surface, lacquer is applied and burnished with charcoal, so that the gold can be seen through the lacquer
Shigajiku	Scrolls that merged poetry in calligraphy and ink painting
Suminagashi	Paper that I have worked with the antique technique of ink decoration. It is considered the most ancient paper marbling technique used two-thousand years ago in China and Japan
Tsujigahama	Partially used to refine coloured motifs
Kohonzuri	Prints executed on silk - on silk paper - on paper Tairei

C O L O R S

For the choice of colors Ligustro always draws inspiration from this testament of a great artist, fitting them to the themes he deals with

(a) ***Cerulean blue*** to fly high

(a) ***Cobalt blue*** for happiness

(an**)** ***Ultramarine blue*** to stimulate the soul

(a) ***Vermilion*** to make the blood circulate cheerfully

(a) ***Moss green*** to soothe the restlessness

(a) ***Golden yellow*** : wealth

(a) ***Cobalt violet*** for reverie

(a) ***Madder lacquer*** to hear the cello

(a) ***Cadmiun yellow*** : science fiction, glittering, brightness

(an) ***Ochre yellow*** to accept the earth

(a) ***VERONESE green*** to remember the spring

(an) ***Indigo*** to tune the spirit to the storm

(an) ***Orange*** to catch sight of a lemon tree from faraway

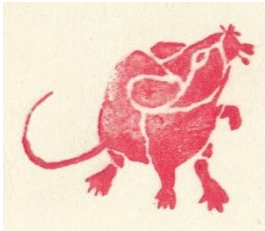
(a) ***Lemon yellow*** for grace

(a) ***Pure white*** : purity

(a) ***Sienna*** : transmutation of gold

(a) ***Sumptuous black*** to see TIZIANO

(an) ***Umber*** to accept the sombre melancholy

(a) ***Burnt sienna*** for a sense of duration.

L I G U S T R O - THE SEALS

	Ri-Gu Ligustro **RI** The lord of tools **GU** the useful tool		Shu-Sei The woodworm Ligustro
	Kio-Shoku Crazy for colors Ligustro		Cho-Raku Engraving the joy Ligustro
	Ze-Co Rainbow searcher Ligustro		Ligustro Berio
	Mu-En The future in dreams Ligustro		Mu-En The fugure in dream Ligustro
	Ligustro		Ligustro

	Ligustro		Ligustro
	Ligustro		Ligustro
	Ligustro and the colors		Ligustro
	Ligustro Berio Engraves		RIGU Ligustro Ze-Co Rainbow searcher Ligustro
	Year of the dragon		Mon General best wishes
	Year of the cock		Year of the cock

Seal	Description	Seal	Description
	Wishes mon Monk in meditation		Wishes mon Monk in meditation
	Wishes mon with Dolphin, Sea, Sun		Wishes mon Japanese boat with the wind from the stern
	Year of the dog		Year of the dragon
	Year of the boar		Live modestly with calm spirit Seal put on Basho's book

	Best wishes mon Many colors around me		Fuji Best wishes mon Day and night
	Year of the mouse		Year of the mouse
	A result finally achieved		Year of the hare
	Year of the snake		Year of the snake
	Year of the dog		Best wishes mon Zen shell Closed, contains everything
	Year of the tiger		Year of the tiger

	Year of the horse		Year of the horse
	Ligustro Berio Engraves		Year of the goat
	Best wishes mon The wave		Best wishes seal pumpkin Zen with Ying and Yang
	Year of the monkey		Year of the monkey
	Best wishes butterfly		

Ligustro (Real Name Giovanni Berio) : A TIMELESS WOODCUTTER

XYLOGRAPHY, AN ANCIENT ART

Xylography, like sculpture, can be considered a "timeless art", unlike painting, which is always linked to the epoch, the culture and the place in which is sprouts.

Paradoxically, xylography – which is an engraving technique consisting in digging out with gouges the matrix in wood and like other printing techniques such as chiselling, etching and lithography, is linked to the greater art, painting – requires the same manual skill in working as is required by the materials of sculpture, i.e. marble, stone and wood.

It is also true that xylography, in its multiform history – from the first Gothic woodcuts to the **Large Passion** and the **Small Passion** by Albrecht Durer, down to the woodcuts by Edward Munch, Felix Vallotton and Eric Gill in the twentieth century – has often changed its status.

In the west many artists did not cut wood and were simply painters that passed their drawings on to cutters: in Japan too, the painters of the Ukiyo-e school simply drew the print, though some, including Katsushika Kokusai, had had an apprenticeship as cutters.

Polychrome xylography was not so successful in the west as black-and-white, down to **Expressionists** like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Eric Heckel and Otto Mueller, who devoted themselves to this technique – in their illustration of books too – with results which were as excellent as those that they achieved in their paintings.

It was a genre that attained its highest lever lf aesthetic quality and the biggest spread in its history in Japan during the Tokugawa epoch from 1658 to 1868.

The oldest woodcuts known in the world, from wood matrixes, are still the ones discovered by Aurel Stein at the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas at Tun-huang, at the extreme western confine of China; they are all Buddhist images and the oldest ones accompany the Chinese translation of a sutra dated to 868 AD.

Other woodcuts from the same cave date from 947 and 983 AD.

On this basis China is credited by one and all with the invention of this printing technique.

The oldest woodcuts printed in two and three colours, with oil pigments, were done in Italy and Germany at the start of the sixteenth century.

They go by the name of "chiaroscuro" prints and were done by artists like the celebrated Siena painter Domenico Beccafumi or the less well-known Antonio da Trento.

There is still uncertainty about whether the rise of polychrome xylography in China was linked to knowledge of these western prints, taken there by the Jesuits, as E. F. Strange hypothesised in 1904, or whether, as appears more likely, the Chinese arrived at this technique through gradual evolution of the printing system, after a phase of hand colouring, also documented in the Buddhist images at Tun-huang and by the fact that, during the Tang dynasty, decorations were done which involved a procedure of wood matrix printing on coloured fabrics.

In the modern epoch xylography has been widely used, both in Europe and in the Far East, in the illustration of religious and non-religious texts: among the oldest ones in china we can mention the polychrome ones of the book **Shih Ch'iu Chai Chu hua p'u** (I use the old system of transliteration because this is how it is given in the western bibliography) and those of the well-known painting manual **Chieh Tzu Yuan** (**The Garden of the Mustard Seed)**, which appeared in several editions and was the basic text for the training of Chinese and later Japanese painters.

The woodprint technique arrived in Japan from China, but, as all scholars agree, it was in Japan, starting from the Tokugawa epoch, that it had an unprecedented development starting from Hishikawa Moronubu, the first true print-designer of the Ukiyo-e school, who in 1658 illustrateed the book Kamo no **Chomei Hoojoki sho**, a Buddhist epitome.

UKIYO-E AND MODERN ART

If I have dwelt at some length on the history of the origins of xylography, it is because I wanted to remind the reader that this technique, in which Ligustro can be considered one of the greatest living artists, came from distant places and was closely linked to the spread of images through printing; in sum, it is noble descent, even though it is not one a millenary on as that of its elder sister painting.

The great merit of the Ukiyo-e school was that through it xylography was no longer limited to the imagery of the Buddhist religion but was also used to illustrate secular stories and themes, in a direct link with novels in the literature of the day by writers like Ihara Saikaku and the dramatis Chikamatsu Monzaemon.

This was a literature that from the middle of the seventeenth century on described the world, the culture and like of the nascent urban society in Edo and Osaka.

This society was made up of merchants, craftsmen and samurai living in the quarters in which there were also the Kabubi theatres and the houses of courtesans, like the Shin Yoshiwara.

Hence there was a culture that in its own way was a bourgeois on, unlike the previous aristocratic one at the imperial court in Kyoto and that found at the places of residence of the feudal seigniors in the various regions. In the field of xylography, the Ukiyo-e painters, in the almost three hundred years of history of this culture, produced works that are not only comparable to those of the great European masters of the same centuries but were also decisive for the development of modern art.

In this connection, it is widely known that the figures of **bijin** (images of beautiful women) by Kitagawa Utamaro and Hosoda Eishi influenced an artist like Toulouse-Lautrec in his posters showing the actresses Jane Avril and May Belfort, and that "views" by Ando Hiroshige were decisive in Van Gogh's development of his idea of landscape, as we clearly see from the "copies" that the Dutch painter did of **Rain on the Ohashi bridge** and **Flowering damson tree at Kameido**, belonging to the series **Meisho Edo hyakkei** (The hundred views of Edo), 1856-1858; this is now recognized in all books of Japanism.

Hence the influence of Japanese xylography in the development of Impressionist and Post-impressionist painting, like that of African painting in the genesis of Cubism, was such a profound one that one could not write a history of modern art without taking it into account.

These considerations appears indispensable when one sets about analysing Ligustro's woodcuts.

The fact is that the latter works would be incomprehensible if one did not bear in mind that his work was born of a precise "revisiting" of Ukiyo-e printing. Ligustro come to xylography rather late in life.

From what he has told me, he began to engrave on "head" wood in the old western manner in 1983, at a ripe age.
Previously, at the start of 1980's, he had done a series of pastels with chalk crayons and aquarelles, views of Liguria landscapes and still lifes with sea in the background denoting considerable skill and a marked creative character.

If of one re-examines them today, they look like works that, in the fullness of the light, show a certain link with the "luminism" of divisionist Ligurian painting at the start of then twentieth century: they call to mind certain coastal landscapes by Rubaldo Merello.

Then came the revelation: in Genoa the painter saw the Ukiyo-e prints and Japanese painting: the discovery is reflected in a series of sheets produced in 1985-86, exercises – as he calls them – in painting only with Indian ink on vegetable fibre, with rapid and watery brushstrokes, studies on swallows, epidendrums and bamboos, a cock with a few touches of colour, olive trees with berry reliefs.

And in this way he was already breaking away from the western tradition, which conceives drawing as a "descriptive" method of analysis of reality, through successive phases from the "sketch" to the "finished work".

In these sheets by Ligustro, following the spirit of **Nanga** painting, the image is not to arise from descriptive speculation in observation, but rather from an interior relationship set up with the thing observed.

"If you want to paint the bamboo you must not draw it: set yourself in from of it and when you feel it in your heart then, and only then, will your hand be able to draw it"; thus wrote a painter of the Ch'ing epoch, and this is what Ligustro must have set out to do.

LIGUSTRO'S TECHNIQUE

The artist's first attempts at woodcuts date from 1985: a view of roof's at Oneglia, with a flower in the foreground and the big circle of the sun in the background; a boat with a sailor at the rudder on a curved sea, and once again the star setting with its trail reflected on the water.

As mentioned, these are woodcuts which were done on "head" wood, and not wood sawn along the grain, as instead is commonly the case and as Ligustro himself was to do subsequently.

But from these first, stringent and almost skeletal attempts to the right "brocade" (nishiki-e) prints of the 1990s the distance was but a short one.

Ligustro, like all self-taught geniuses, was to borrow the elements of Japanese printing and elaborate them in a personal technique of his own; thus he was to produce his own instruments in order to achieve the desired effects: the **baren**, or dabber disc to press the sheet on the wooden matrix, made of cork and not rope and having variable diameter; the **kento,** or marginal register on the matrixes, with a variable module, an idea which only appears banal at first sight – like all innovative ideas – that the artist must have borrowed from the old rule boxes of printing characters, but which in fact also permitted him to manage to use dozens and dozens of matrixes on the same sheet without accumulating wooden boards.

Thus from the first attempts at polychromy, arabesques of lemons in yellow, gold, green and violet, Ligustro came to his first little xylographic masterpiece, **Il mio mondo** [My world], 1989, a sheet of more than fifty centimetres, in which he showed all the magic of Nishiki-e technique: **gofun**, the use of shell powder in pigment; **Karazuri**, a printing technique for dry impression, with relief effects; **sabi bori**, a printing technique that highlights the brushstrokes; and **bokashi**, the graduation of colour – and in this connection one should see the precious little glossary by Fiamma del Gaizo at the end of the catalogue of the recent exhibition **Arte xilografica giapponese dei secoli XVIII-XX** [Japanese xylography art in the 18 th – 20 th centuries] for the decennial of the Centre for studies on Far Eastern Art in Bologna.

During the last decade Ligustro's creative xylographic vein has greatly developed: from precious experiments like **Il sogno di Chuang Tse : La farfalla** [The dream of Chuang Tse: The butterfly] – a sheet accompanied by the calligraphy "Nothing is known and everything is imaged", which stylistically evokes much art deco graphics – to the first series of the three different "states" of **Ineja,** with views of the Gulf of Imperia at three different stages of the sun's progress, from dawn to night.

This attention paid by Ligustro to the variations in light in the course of the day, seen as an intonation of colours on the same drawing, also returns, it seems to me, in another series of variants: **Il circo** [The circus], 1998, and **La Finestra del pittore** [The painter's window], done in the same year.

These are big sheets, measuring sixty by forty centimetres, in which he shows all his great skill as a cutter and printer – it must be remembered that in Japan these were two different people – and above all his authentic nature as a poet of the image.

Like **Sole nella rete** [Sun in the net], 1998, **Palloncini** [Balloons], 1998, **Varco nel cielo** [Beach in the sky], 1999, **La danza del sole** [The sun's dance] and **Malinconica attesa** [Melancholy wait], 2000, these are powerful examples of how xylography, in this age of conceptual and computerised art, continues to thrive; of how much imagination and man's patient hand can put into expression of the figures in the world.

Lastly, there is the print that I prefer, Geisha alla finestra con veduta di Oneglia [Geisha at the window with view of Oneglia], 1998. I deem it one of the little xylography masterpieces of the twentieth century.

In one image it sums up some of the central motifs of our figurative culture: the image of the woman seen from the back as she combs her hair, the window on the gulf with moonlight, the flower in the foreground and the base wing, the screen of wisterias, with the lizard that seems to be looking at the silvery moon.

Here, with full autonomy on the part of the illustrator – and I speak of "illustration" in the highest sense of the word – on assists at the whole series of "visual echoes", from Utamaro to Matisse, from the Nabis to art deco. For this was the magic of Ligustro, that, at the moment when he wanted to "remake" Ukiyo-e, he "made" himself; and all the technical promptings that merged in his very great manual skill, from the refinements of the suri-mono to the elegange of the nishiki-e, yielded to the imagination of a man of our own day.

LIGUSTRO AND HIS JAPANESE MODELS

If it is useful to trace out a stylistic analysis of the development in Ligustro's woodcuttings, it shows that the latter are not close to those of the great artists of the golden epoch of Ukiyo-e, namely Harunobu, Utomaro and Kiyonaga, even though he did look to them, and indeed paid homage to them in a print like Aragosta [Lobster], 1997, as he did with Hiroshige. Instead, he is closer to outsiders to xylography, like Paul Jacoulet, and to twentieth-century Japanese artists like Yamamoto Shoun (1870 – 1942), with the typical floral frames sound female portraits, or Kawase Hasui (1883 – 1957), when he draws flowers, as in Iris, 1929, and not landscapes, and lastly Yamamura Koka (1885 – 1942), all artists who elaborated the Ukiyo-e tradition in a modern key.

And another precious little work by Ligustro, the portrait of **Lindsay Kemp in Onnagata,** 1992, confirms this feeling he has for the artists working between the two wars, a vocation which is certainly not affected but is not severe either, but rather fanciful. There, as I come out of Ligustro' studio after my visit, on the shelf where his favourite books are I see, monographs by Seraut, Toulouse – Lautrec, Douanier Rousseau, but also Folon.

Thus I reflect that the great art of drawing has never been wedded to manual toil, the hewing of the sculptor, in the same way as in xylography.

Ligustro smiles and tells me how he gets that powder that makes his prints so refined, perlaceous shell mica, from Korea.

Only now do I realise why these sheets aroused such enthusiasm in our common friend and teacher, Jack Hillier, to whom modern criticism of Ukiyo-e owes so much: "Your print is so enchanting, so exquisitely cut and printed, that I do not think anything I can teach you … you have produced something so personal and original, that it might even harm your work if you had regular instruction, which might tend to cramp your style (in a letter to Ligustro dated 10 July 1987).

Hillier, who before being a scholar was a passionate woodcutter, was fully aware that the history of engraving is renewed in every epoch and produces its purest fruits outside all convetion.

Marco Fagioli

Prof. Marco Fagioli

He lives in Florence where he teaches Art Expertise by Istituiti di Cultura Americana in Italia and he's a consultant for ancient art by Farsettiarte in Prato.
Between the numerous publication about Chinese and Japanese prints, have to be remembered: Utamaro koi no hutosao, Florence, 1977; Hokusai Wakan Ehon Sakigake, Florence, 1978; Utamaro, Opere scelte, Milan, 1979; Frammenti dell'effimero, Stampe giapponesi dal XVII al XX secolo, Florence, 1981; Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Novanta disegni, Firenze, 1985; Shunga, images du printemps, L'erotisme dans l'estampe japonaise, Musée d'Ixelles, Bruxelles, 1989; L'image de la femme dans l'art Ukiyo-e et dans la letterature, in Estampes Japonaises.
Collection des Musée royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles, 1989; Shunga. Japanese erotic prints, Firenze, 1990. Tra i contributi sulla scultura e pittura antica e moderna ricordiamo: quello per il catalogo Donatello e il primo Rinascimento nei calchi della Gipsoteca, Firenze, 1985; le monografie su Medardo Rosso, Firenze, 1993; su Filippo Lippi, Firenze, 1997; i cataloghi delle grandi mostre sull'arte Toscana del Novecento, Come un paese in una pupilla, 1993 e L'immagine della società, 1999, San Miniato, Pisa. Infine il volume Shunga, Ars amandi in Giappone, 1997, riconosciuto dalla critica come maggior contributo sull'argomento e pubblicato in coedizione inglese dalla UNIVERSE (Rizzoli International Pubblication), New York 1998, in francese da SEUIL, Parigi 1998, e in tedesco da WASMUT, Berlino 1998. Recentemente ha pubblicato nelle edizioni AIO'N il catalogo monografico su Elisabeth Chaplin, Tra simbolismo e neo-spiritualismo, Firenze, 2001, e il saggio Momenti della pittura cinese, Dalle origini alla dinastia Yuan, Firenze, 2001.

Jack Hillier’s letter

Berio Ligustro seemed destined to become a print-maker, and especially a colour-woodblock print-maker.

In convalescence in 1972, after a heart attack, he began to take an interest in oil painting, but found no inspiration in that medium nor in pastel which he came to later.
But pastel did lead him to a study of a variety of papers.

It was, as much as anything, the amazing qualities of Japanese paper that led him to Japanese graphics, and quite suddenly, he found that not only was he drawn to experiment in cutting woodblocks for prints in the “Nishiki-e” style (the colourful “brocade” manner) but that he had an unexpected flair for handling this intricate oriental technique.
Having found a medium that allowed him to express himself, he taught himself the laborious processes of print production. There have been numbers of western artists who have attempted to make woodblocks colour-prints – Henry Rivière and John Platt for instance – but none has approached Ligustro’s mastery of the complexities of cutting and printing techniques.

Among the Japanese the most extreme examples of this technical virtuosity were reserved for a certain, usually quite small, type of print, called “Surimono” (literally a “printed thing”, but in effect usually a commemorative print, or one of seasonal greetings, or simply a mean of publishing verses).

Amazingly, Berio Ligustro has followed the Japanese not only in colour woodblock techniques, but in creating prints that have symbolism and incorporate poetry, Japanese calligraphy and an imaginative use of images, with lavish use of Hand-carved seals that may simply give “artist names” or even some pictorial elements expressing good wishes for longevity or the like.

But certainly, the most astonishing of the artist’s gifts is his surpassing ability in cutting the blocks and achieving printing effects rivalling the virtuosity of the Japanese craftsmen.

No colour reproduction can do justice to the original, either in the brilliance of the metallic gold and silver overlays or the blind printing that is used for embossing.
The square Surimono of “Fireflies and a crescent moon” gives some ideas of the intricacies of gold and silver veining and the gradation of the colour in the sky, from dark indigo to magical lilac serving as a background to the fireflies, each with its silver halo.
Another Surimono shows a spider in a golden web of exquisite fragility, spun between poppies in a field and a scarecrow.

Behind, as so often in a Ligustro print, looms a glorious red sun.
In a series of prints dedicated to the “Twelve Months”, February bears an inset scene of a group of colourful anemones that light up a snowy waste under dark trees.

Always, in his prints, there is this kind of unexpected poetry, expressed in colour woodblocks of incredible accomplishment.

There are unique among modern graphics.

Jack Hillier

Jack Hillier, for twenty-five years a consultant in oriental art to Sotheby's, is the author of numerous books on Japanese prints and paintings. Among his most recent publications are *Japanese Prints and Drawing from the Vever Collection* (Sotheby's, 1976) and *The Art of Hokusai in Book Illustration* (Sotheby's and University of California Press, 1980).

Fukuda Kazuhiko’s letter

One day early in 1991, as if I was opening a little, mysterious bamboo container, I opened the door of Ligustro’s workshop in the port town, close to the border with France.
The smell of printer’s ink, and saline permeated the studio and filtered in like the bright sunlight of southern Europe.
At first I could discern nothing, but singing and dancing in the air were the colours without number of wood engraving bathed in dazzling gold, silver, reds, blues and greens.
Coloured woodblock printing, which originated in Japan under the name of Nishiki-e has been reborn in Imperia, on the shores of the Mediterranean, in completely new forms.
Ligustro’s engraving do not depict the sober-tinted poetic lovers and the sense of nature in the Japanese style.
Instead the colours are clear, vivid, brilliant: a real chromatic sarabande of Mediterranean light and colour.
The engraving in relief and the gold and the silver leaf do not have the tones of the “brocade prints”; they have the beauty of Gobelings tapestries, dense and sumptuous.
Thus the art of the woodcut, which has escaped the borders of Japan, of space and of time has now found in the hands of Ligustro in artistic breath of life of baroque magnificence.
Ligustro’s prints create an artistic world where the muse plays the harp.
Look at their immediate grace; I will not be alone in becoming drunk on this pure beauty.
If I may borrow a saying from the ancient Chinese, these engravings are pleasant places in an enchanted country, meeting places ineffably distilled.
Fundamentally different to the Japanese woodcuts, they throw new light on modern engraving and at the same time the product of marvellous poetry.

Fukuda Kazuhiko

Prof. Kazuhiko Fukuda

Born in Osaka. He has been a teacher by University of Kanazawa.
He’s one of the most important studious of Japanese art. He’s the author of more than one hundreds volumes, most of them dedicated to the history of Ukiyo-e, the fantastic world of Japanese prints.